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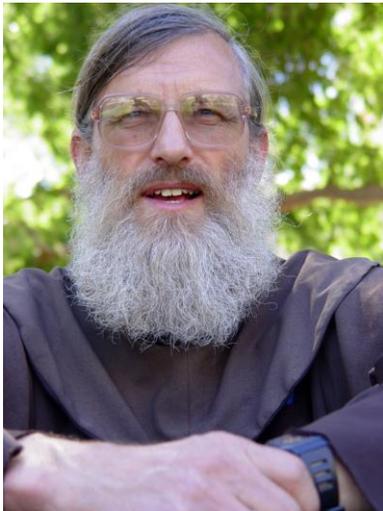
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Friar to the Homeless Gets Special Birthday Gift: 2010 Peace Award

SCOTTSDALE, AZ -- Brother David Buer, OFM, a Franciscan friar who has been working with the homeless and marginalized in Tucson and Las Vegas, received a special birthday gift on Oct. 26, a day after he turned 57 -- the National Peace Award from the Secular Franciscan Order.



Bishop Eduardo Alanis Nevares, the newly installed auxiliary bishop of Phoenix, presented the award during the order's national chapter, held Oct. 26-31 at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, AZ. Brother David's mother, Doris Buer, flew in from Ballwin, MO to join in the presentation.

"It's my experience that we can expect God's blessing when we bring these people --the poor, the homeless, the migrants -- into our circle of love," Brother David told some 75 ministers, delegates and observers representing 14,000 Secular Franciscans across the U.S. He said he was humbled and honored to receive the same award that, in the past, also went to the likes of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa of Calcutta.

Brother David said he was inspired to work among the poor and homeless by the words of Jesus Christ and by a simple act of St. Francis of Assisi. A passage in Matthew's Gospel "shot through me" -- the one where Jesus says, "whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me." And St. Francis, the spoiled son of a wealthy merchant, had a life-changing moment when he encountered a leper on the road: Instead of giving him wide berth, Francis embraced the leper. "Who are the lepers of today?" Brother David asked. "Who are the marginalized people?"

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Brother David entered the religious order late in life, making his permanent profession as a Franciscan brother in 1996 – a year before he arrived in Las Vegas, where he established Poverello House, a daytime refuge for the homeless. In 2002 he established a second Poverello House in Henderson, NV. He also went on a two-week vigil and fast in Las Vegas, living in a tent on a vacant lot to publicize the need for more shelters. A group of homeless men befriended and protected him during the vigil. “It put me in solidarity with those who have less.”

Next he was assigned to Tucson, AZ, where in 2008 he established another Poverello House and where, for the past five summers, he set up Cooling Centers at two churches six days a week (three days at each church). The homeless could escape the oppressive summer heat in an air conditioned center and find food, cold beverages and a place to relax and read.

Brother David became a candidate with the Franciscan Friars of the Santa Barbara Province in 1989, and went through a number of years of formation that included a year as a postulant in Portland, OR; a year as a novice at Santa Barbara Mission; a post-novitiate year in the missions in Guatemala; three years in the San Francisco Bay Area, studying theology and working part-time in a soup kitchen and shelter; and several years working with the Nevada Desert Experience to discourage the use and production of nuclear weapons.

Brother David is the son of Doris and Otto Buer of Ballwin, MO. Born at San Antonio, TX Army Medical Center during the Korean War, he spent his early years in Granite City, IL, and moved with his family to Ballwin at the age of 15. He graduated from Parkway West High School there in 1971 before attending Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield, MO for two years. He worked at a McDonalds fast food restaurant and then as a car salesman over a period of a year. At the time, he said, he was an agnostic, but then began what he described as a spiritual journey, hitchhiking from St. Louis to San Diego, CA. He happened upon a beach house that was in need of repair, and the owner let him stay there for several months, rent-free, while helping to fix it up.

“It was like a hermitage time for me,” he said. After that, he hitchhiked back to Granite City, IL, where he started attending church in the parish where his parents were married, and where his faith blossomed. “That’s when I read a book about St. Francis,” he noted, which led him to seek out some friars at a neighboring parish. He was invited to Chicago to stay at a house of discernment, and he joined the Secular Franciscan Order. “I was hungering for living closer to the poor,” he recalled. “The answer to my prayer was the ‘Gospel Brothers’, a Franciscan friary in uptown Chicago.” He lived there from 1978 to 1982, working in soup kitchens and shelters and helping the elderly with shopping. In 1982 Fr. Phil Marquard, OFM, asked him to help start a Franciscan volunteer community to serve the poor. The Franciscan House of Mary and Joseph opened in 1983 – a 250-bed shelter for homeless men and women. He worked there until joining the friars as a candidate in 1989.

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The Peace Award comes with a St. Francis statue and a \$2,000 prize. “That money is going to Poverello House in Tucson,” Brother David said.

The annual award was revived in 2007 after a lapse of several years. The 2007 award recognized the work of Dr. Tony Lazzara, an American physician and Secular Franciscan who operates a clinic and shelter for ailing children in Peru. The 2008 award honored Marie Dennis, a Secular Franciscan who directs the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and who is immersed in advocating on behalf of people marginalized by society, poverty, abuse, war, violence, and human trafficking. The 2009 award went to Don Ryder, a Secular Franciscan from Wisconsin who helped save the Maasai people in Kenya from disease and drought by drilling water wells.

The Secular Franciscan Order is an order of single and married Catholics who profess to bring the Gospel to life in the spirit of St. Francis.

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